

This Week in Congress

December 22, 2008

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Greetings for the Christmas and New Year Season

This year, I hope that you and your family have a very merry Christmas and a safe and happy New Year. During these challenging times, it is important to reflect on what we have to be thankful for - memories, family and friends. During the holiday season as we gather to celebrate, I encourage you to remember our soldiers that are serving both here in the U.S. and abroad and their families. It is most important that we remember those who are defending our freedom half a world away, who cannot be with their families for Christmas. I am thankful for their service to our country and am praying for their safe return.

Let us also not forget those who are less fortunate during this time of giving. This week, I joined the Salvation Army in Hays to participate in their annual bell ringing campaign. The proceeds from this annual fundraising drive go to help those less fortunate within our communities.

In the spirit of the season, I joined my district staff for a Christmas dinner at Ringneck Ranch, a well-known location for attracting bird hunters, in Tipton. Thank you to Keith and Debra Houghton for their warm hospitality. Also this week, I was able to attend the Hays High School Winter Concert.

As 2008 comes to a close, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to serve you in Congress. Over the next few weeks, I will be continuing my annual listening tour. I hope you will come and see me when I am in your community. The next edition of This Week in Congress will be sent on January 5, 2009.

From my family to yours, have a merry Christmas and may all your holidays be safe and full of joy.

Helping to Provide Food to Those in Need

Food banks across our state play an important role in meeting the needs of the hungry. This week, my offices in Hays, Hutchinson and Salina concluded our community food drives. While food drives come and go, the needs of hungry Kansans remain. I encourage those who are able to consider others in need and give what they can throughout the year.

Also this week, I was reappointed as a co-chairman of the House Hunger Caucus. The members of the caucus work to raise awareness about issues surrounding hunger and the important role of American grown agricultural products. As co-chair of the caucus, I will continue my efforts to raise awareness about this issue and work in Congress to strengthen programs, such as food stamps, that address the long term needs of the hungry. To read more about my reappointment, [click here](#) .

Thank you to all who donated food this Christmas season.

Addressing President-elect Obama's Secretary of Agriculture Nomination

In a press conference this week, President-elect Barack Obama announced former Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack as his nominee for Secretary of Agriculture. It is important that the next Secretary be an advocate for agriculture and work to ensure that the needs of our country's farmers and ranchers are met. I hosted a conference call with Kansas agriculture radio broadcasters the day of the announcement to discuss my thoughts on the Secretary of Agriculture nomination.

Over the next four years, the new administration will be confronted with major issues that will affect producers- such as the implementation of a new farm bill. Producers need a Secretary of Agriculture who will ensure a strong, market-based safety net for producers, seek incentives for new farmers, pursue trade opportunities, and address high input costs. While I have never met Gov. Vilsack, I understand that he supports the use of biofuels to help meet our nation's energy needs and the use of biotechnology to enhance the productivity of agriculture to meet our future food, fiber, and energy demands.

I am unaware of Gov. Vilsack's position on market-oriented safety net programs important to Kansas producers like crop insurance and direct payments. I will work to express to the new secretary the importance of the connection between agriculture and the environment, which is essential when crafting commonsense, user-friendly conservation programs at USDA and engaging other cabinet officials about the impact environmental regulations will have on agricultural producers.

As Congress and the Obama Administration make decisions that will affect agriculture over the next few years, it will be essential to have a hands-on Secretary of Agriculture, not just a spokesperson for the administration. I welcome Gov. Vilsack as the next Secretary of Agriculture and look forward to working with him.

Annual Listening Tour Begins

My annual Big First Listening Tour began this week with stops to Washington, Republic, Gove, Sheridan, Ness, Hodgeman, Meade, Clark and Russell counties. This morning, I was in Reno County and visited with Kansans at Hutchinson Community College. Later today, I will hold a town hall in the Student Union at Sterling College, 125 W. Cooper, in Rice County from 12:30 to 1:00 p.m.

Tomorrow, December 23, I will be in Osborne County, in Alton, at Homestead Restaurant, 601 Mill Street, from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. Tomorrow afternoon, I will be in Rooks County, in Stockton, visiting with Kansans at the Rooks County Health Department, 426 Main, from 12:30 to 1:00 p.m.

The following week, I will be in Pawnee, Morris, Geary and Phillips counties. Next week's stops are scheduled as follows:

Monday, December 29

Pawnee County Tour Stop, Burdett

Time: 12:00-1:00 PM

Location: Burdett Senior Center

Address: 203 Elm Street

Tuesday, December 30

Morris County Tour Stop, White City

Time: 10:15-11:15 AM

Location: Community Building

Address: 118 W. McKenzie

Geary County Tour Stop, Junction City

Time: 12:30-1:00 PM

Location: Washington Street Grille (Bartel House)

Address: 602 N. Washington Street

Wednesday, December 31

Phillips County Tour Stop, Logan

Time: 9:30-10:30 AM

Location: Trojan Café

Address: 107 W. Main St

Having the opportunity to visit with residents during each of these town halls lets me stay involved in the issues important to Kansans. [Click here](#) to view other stops scheduled for next week and to stay up-to-date on tour times, dates and locations.

Preparing for the Transition to Digital Television in 2009

Last Wednesday, December 17, marked exactly two months before the transition from analog to digital television. Television stations nationwide will be required to switch from the current analog method of transmitting television signals, to a digital method by February 17, 2009. This will affect viewing access for households that use analog TV. These households will need to take steps in the next two months to ensure a successful transition. More information about these necessary steps is available on this Web site of the National Association of Broadcasters - <http://www.dtvanswers.com/> . As there are now less than two months before the transition, I encourage Kansans to explore their options in order to make this a smooth process.

Very truly yours,

Jerry